

## **Report on the Workshop : Refining Trust: Palestine in Comparative Perspective**

The Von Hügel Institute, St Edmund's College, Cambridge University.

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The aim of the workshop **Refining Trust: Palestine in Comparative Perspective** was to discuss conditions, practices and environmental contexts that enable conflicting parties to achieve a peaceful solution, and consider how such conditions might be transferrable to the current case of Palestine. The event, organised by Ralf Wüstenberg and Colin H. Williams, both Senior Research Associates of the Von Hügel Institute (VHI) and supported by the DAAD-University of Cambridge Research Hub for German Studies with funds from the German Federal Foreign Office (FFO), brought together scholars and practitioners with expertise in different country-specific cases of political reconciliation post-1989, with a particular focus on German reunification, and also including the cases of Northern Ireland, Rwanda and the Republic of South Africa.

The Chair and Rapporteur, Professor Colin H. Williams, welcomed the participants and expressed his thanks, on behalf of the VHI, for their willingness to engage in this most challenging of themes.

He thanked the VHI Director Dr Philip McCosker and Dr Lidia Ripamonti for their hosting of the workshop and Professor Ralf Wüstenberg who devised the programme of speakers, together with

his colleague at Europa-Universität Flensburg, Thies Münchow, who provided organisational assistance.

He then acknowledged the financial support of the three sponsors the VHI, Cambridge University, the DAAD Cambridge and the Europa-Universität Flensburg.

The workshop opened by discussing the principal focus of the meeting, namely Palestine in comparative perspective.

### **The Case of Palestine-History and Vision**

#### **Speaker Dr Zeina Barakat, Friedrich-Schiller Universität, Jena**

Dr Barakat provided a powerful and penetrating account of the vicissitudes of the Arab-Israeli conflict which highlighted the legacy of imperial and colonial rule and their promised outcomes, many of which were unfulfilled. Illustration of the impact of the various military interventions, regional conflagrations, attempted solutions and on-going sources of tension was enriched by a selective use of political texts and maps.

The basics of life, such as water, the need for land and security, access to education and individual mobility, were set in sharp contrast to another layer of meaning, namely the religious and ideological filters by which Palestinian-Israeli relations were mediated. The presentation gave a vital summary of the obstacles to peace and enumerated the key concessions which both sides to the dispute were required to make before fundamental trust could be established. A warning was given that active negotiations and the construction of

bridges for mutual respect and trust could not wait for the conflict to be over, but rather that engagement should proceed forthwith.

The presentation appealed to the conflicting participants to bear in mind their responsibility to future generations, not just the immediate and often cynically-motivated short-term episodes of violence and revenge. The speaker ended on a note of optimism by providing her own personal vision of what the next decade might bring in terms of gradual reconciliation.

**Respondent Abu El-Ezz, An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine**

Acting as respondent to the opening paper, Dr Abu El-Ezz argued that he was unable to share such optimism although he found the presentation provocative. After reminding us about the troubled history of the Palestinian people, he argued that real peace could only be built upon justice, but such justice was largely absent at present for Palestinians effectively occupied a set of spaces which acted in effect as an open prison. He illustrated the daily round of difficulties which individual residents experienced in a variety of spheres, especially internal and external travel restrictions.

The issue of continued occupation of the land, growing settlements, and control of water continue to animate debates and grievances and until such time as these were resolved or substantially improved he did not envisage that there was much common ground for lasting dialogue. Above all whilst the people no longer construct or control their own borders, their own trajectory, there is little ground for reconciliation. To do otherwise he argued was seen as a sign of

weakness, so that to accept the permanent condition of eretz Israel as it stands, is a denial of Palestine's right to exist as a legitimate polity. From his perspective it is a zero-sum game, not a transitional process towards a shared, common future. While the occupied territories are legitimised as authentic Israeli spaces, then historical claims to land, resources, space and habitats by Palestinians are either downplayed or dismissed. The resultant narrative constructed is a partial and fragmented set of interpretations provided by some experts in the international community which does not recognise the basic source of grievance, namely dispossession from one's own homeland.

The Chair invited the South African Ambassador to Palestine, Ashraf Y Suliman to comment further based on his daily experience of living and working in the territory. He outlined four necessary preconditions, based on the South African experience, before Palestinian-Israeli negotiations could resume. With reference to radical change in a number of other contexts and the destiny of key players within the Middle East, he argued that the absence of a well-developed value system which was conducive to peace was the principal barrier to long-term Palestinian development and suggested that the emergence of a new set of leaders offered some degree of hope for a lasting accommodation of the conflicting sides.

The open discussion which followed contained a very rich variety of perspectives where participants drawing on their own academic and personal experiences were able to draw out lessons and best practice solutions to the Palestinian situation.

**Saturday 10 March 2018**

## **The Case of Germany and of South Africa**

**Speaker: Ralf Wüstenberg, Flensburg/Cambridge**

Building on his previous theoretical and empirical work, Prof Wüstenberg's presentation addressed several key questions related to the refining of the conditions of trust. His initial focus was the systemic change which accompanied the German reunification process. A critical concern was whether amnesty required forgiveness. Three ideal type different approaches to any post-conflict transitional period were introduced and evaluated and the speaker argued that Germany was a good example of the third type of transition where a large element of continuity was underpinned by a truth commission, narratives of suffering and victimhood, and admissions of guilt and forgiveness which led to a degree of political reconciliation. The question was raised as to how far one could expect spiritual or religious precepts of forgiveness and reconciliation to work across into the political realm so as to achieve full restitution and the audience were reminded that a fundamental element of the whole reconciliation and unification process was the salience of personal responsibility and forgiveness.

The focus then switched to how dimensions of truth telling itself could be applied from the German and RSA cases to Palestine. The RSA Truth and Reconciliation Commission experience was applauded as an exemplar of how to allow individuals from a wide range of backgrounds to contribute authentic commentaries and to name perpetrators of injustice. The cold facts that more than 20,000 victim stories occupied 80 pages in the TRC Final Report, meant that the public record bore witness to the suffering which Apartheid had occasioned. The TRC experience also provided a profound insight, namely that human dignity is inviolable.

However, the whole essence of the German and RSA comparison was to transfer the lessons of such experiences to the Palestinian issue and on this Prof Wústenberg was convinced that the preconditions for reconciliation were still unclear and consequently Palestine would remain in transition. On a broader front relating to any conflict or post-conflict reconstruction he drew attention to the different levels of self-knowledge where reconciliation within oneself was a *sine qua non* for coming to terms with the past.

**Respondent: Ashraf Y Suliman, South African Ambassador to Palestine.**

The Ambassador rehearsed several of the key events which have influenced the current situation within a post-apartheid RSA and drew attention to the role which exiled political activists, international organisations and the international system had had on the overthrow of Apartheid.

Two signal insights demanded our attention, namely at a systematic level how do you deal with the victims of Apartheid and at a personal level, the plea of one mother addressing the TRC who asked why did my son die? He argued that although the TRC has several flaws, the RSA had devised a method of dealing with its tumultuous past.

When seeking to apply some evidence from RSA to Palestine, it was observed that while the systematic control of workers and residents' movement within and between the territories is oppressive, there were grounds for arguing that positive elements were present which could be used as a springboard for securing a more prosperous

existence. Chief of these was a vibrant private sector and a sense of vitality within the community. Some of the hope which the Ambassador witnessed was provided by various religious leaders and people of good will.

The general discussion revolved around the possibility that hegemonic narratives, far from being locked in to the past, could be rewritten, but unlike RSA and Germany, the intransigent problem for Israel-Palestine was that a single shared space was claimed simultaneously, both on settlement and historic grounds, but also more significantly from religious precedents and divine claims which were seemingly intractable. In that sense the Palestinian case was of a different order from that of Germany and the RSA.

A very influential insight was the differentiation between rhetoric and poetic narratives in the construction of a plurality of interpretation. Different consequences flow from the narrative discourse which is constructed, and this communicates both obvious and subliminal messages as to what counts as legitimate and authentic. It also marks what issues are not subject to disputation. The theme of narrative construction and reinterpretation became a well-used paradigm throughout the workshop and would repay additional work in any conflict analysis.

Turning from narratives to international perceptions, it was argued that Palestinians were increasingly isolated and marginalised within the international community and that for two reasons. First the Syrian conflict had overshadowed the Palestinian question and secondly globalisation and changing economic relations had damaged external prospects for aid and trade, for Palestinians could no longer depend

unquestionably on former supporters and partners, such as China and India, who of late have built stronger relationships with Israel for largely commercial and logistical reasons. As a consequence, the dominant mood of the discussion, that only a Palestinian generated solution would provide a lasting answer to tension, was increasingly reinforced by structural trends within the region and beyond.

A final insight was the discussion between structure and agency. Having spent most of the time debating geo-strategic, international legal and civil society issues, there emerged a strong yearning for a new set of actors and leaders so that Mandela-like strong, charismatic and forgiving personalities would conduct more consensual relations within the Palestine-Israel context.

### **The Case of Northern Ireland**

#### **Dr Maria Power, University of Liverpool**

Dr Power's core argument was that grassroots, bottom up pressure is the key to reconciliation and inter-community tensions. It was argued that conventional political structures have a tendency to fail, whereas peace on the ground mediated by local communities is ongoing and fundamental.

We were reminded that the political structure and process provided by the Good Friday Agreement on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998, whilst widely welcomed as a mechanism for peace building, was initially short lived due to the Omagh bombing of the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1998. The consociational democratic approach which survived in largely utilitarian mode following the establishment of power sharing, was not without its own structural strains and in the past year has given



way to internal arguments, the breakdown of devolved government and the reimposition of direct rule from Westminster.

We were also reminded that the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement was premature, while the Good Friday Agreement provided a vision of the kind of values a common society would uphold. This is because most of the grievances and preconditions to a full settlement were agreed in statute by both the British and Irish governments. Consequently, a stable and relatively prosperous period has ensued where new investment, infrastructural developments, and the establishment of both North-South and East-West bodies have created a new set of economic and political realities. Doubtless these relationships will be strained in the run-up to Brexit and even more perhaps after Spring 2019 should an unsatisfactory border and trade relationship characterise the transition period.

But what of full reconciliation? It was argued that Duncan Morrow's (2016) definition of reconciliation was seen to be a realistic interpretation which recognises the ongoing difficulty of securing mutual trust. This was illustrated in physical space terms by reference to the 'peace walls' of Belfast, the interfaces which act as shatter belts between communities of hurt and suffering. Far from being only symbols of separation such interfaces could be transformed into loci of association. Here, the presenter used Lederach's tripartite interpretation of the path towards reconciliation as a framework by which localised interactions could be interpreted. This is because the presenter valued community interaction above political antagonism. A safe space for faith-based communities was applauded as a means of getting to understand, empathise, and grow respect for previously oppositional communities. The peace-line ecumenical interventions

used dialogue through prayer to harness the good will of the local religious organisations.

Details were given of various religious outreach initiatives which were treated as models of Christian reconciliation. The pioneering work they undertake includes prayer and outreach, community relations and social action projects in localised spaces, intimate interactions and listening communities, which are largely female in personnel. Thus, as illustration, the Lamb of God community provided a one stop shop for trust and practical ministry for local people, which included counselling for victims of violence. A change of gear heralded Christian outreach and approaches to engaging with hard politics, 'the more serious work of understanding identities', for both communities felt estranged when faced with the political institutions and representative politics as illustrated by Stormont.

Local, rather than sub-state or international initiatives were seen as providing the most promising seeds for reconciliation. Indeed, it was concluded that a grant-dependent peace industry, driven on by short term goals and cycles which does not allow any permanent reproduction of good practice, is a major weakness of the internationalisation of the conflict. Thus, despite progress and all the good intentions of many of the parties involved, the presentation concluded that it would seem all but impossible to construct a shared narrative as a basis for a renewed future.

**Respondent: Maria Palme, University of Jena**

The first substantive point made by Maria Palme was that seen in a comparative perspective Northern Ireland would seem to represent a positive outcome of a transition process. In the German case, by contrast, the short transitional period following reunification did not assuage feelings of frustration and grievance, especially against those

who were involved in the security apparatus and police force and the lack of continuity meant that there was little room for a shared narrative drawn from the past.

The marginalisation and partial erasure of the East German identity after forty years, has caused a deep fracture in the reconciliation process. The cutting edge of this was the introduction of new actors within the administration of the unified state and the 80% replacement of East German by West German civil servants. Consequently the accompanying lack of continuity created a barrier for the construction of relationships of trust.

However, a common civil rights tradition and community empowerment mobilisation characterised both German and Northern Irish cases. The more contested narrative after reunification was that there was no truth without reconciliation, which needed both perspectives to recognise that in fact there is no reconciliation without truth.

In open discussion, when the temporal element was considered, it was observed that both the diaspora and future generations have different perspectives on the past conflict and should be incorporated into any new or revised interpretation of contemporary German history.

It was also observed that greater effort needs to be undertaken to search for historical common similarities which characterised relations between communities which had drifted into conflict. A classic illustration derived from British imperialism was the

consideration that as both India and Pakistan, have a common, shared past and similar experiences as victims of colonialism; this past could be used as potentially fruitful basis for future reconciliation, involving a reconstructed narrative of similarity.

In a return to the fundamentals of life and shared experiences it was noted that among largely working-class neighbourhoods of Belfast and Derry chronic unemployment, mental health issues and the shared experience of poverty was not enough to overcome the politics of difference and continued differentiation in Northern Ireland.

How is trust achieved? In the Israeli case, the difficulties entailed by the Holocaust and on-going vulnerability due to security breaches are often mirrored within the Palestinian communities by their refusal to accept aspects of their own past experiences, while such self-censorship hinders an open discussion.

It was also advised that grass-root initiatives should not be allowed to be dominated by politicians who have a hidden or different agenda, and in the case of Palestine it was argued this it was only by mobilising community activists and not professional politicians and leaders alone that a long-term solution could be conceived and implemented.

Rather than search for a common narrative based on a past shared experience, Dr Power suggested that what was needed was for all people to develop a set of critical skills by which they could read the past and articulate the messages, values and perceptions with which they are presented. It was acknowledge however that a salient

problem with the common past perspective was that it gets in the way of a shared/joined attention by which the future can be navigated.

Is peace, peace for all, or just peace for some, especially if in some contexts the security and police service are left largely intact? The suspicion was that if left intact such agents of the state could perpetuate structural tensions.

A final insight was not to undervalue the role of the international community, whose often self-interested interventions and actions often perceive and use the Palestinian cause as an extension of their own foreign policy, trade, commercial and geo-strategic advantage.

### **The Case of Rwanda**

#### **Speaker: Dr Gerd Hankel, Hamburg**

Basic demographic and geographical facts were presented as an introduction to the Rwandan case of genocide, where 500,000 Tutsi were killed primarily by Hutu. After the genocide many Tutsu exiles returned and as a consequence about 2 million Hutu fled to Tanzania and Zaire for fear of their lives. In the post-genocide period, post 1994 violence continued as a means of 'pacification' while the new regime made many incursions into neighbouring states to quell pockets of resistance.

The key issue raised was how does a former governing minority react to its own overthrow and search for restitution within a renewed society. The dominant message from several other contexts such as RSA was that 'the truth heals'. It helps lay the foundation for a post-reconstruction revitalisation. In post 1994 Rwanda, the new

government sought to establish a new state together with a new shared vision where a common identity was forged, according to a new strategy. Within a reconciled society stronger economic and educational initiatives helped add to the quality of life. Today it was asserted there have been vast improvements in the socioeconomic life of the society.

However, the judicial process still created some inconsistencies. Thus, an attempt was made to end impunity by judging those who were culpable of the genocide acts. Gacaca courts hosted by lay judges, represent a communal system of justice. Between 2002 and 2012 more than a million people were prosecuted and sentenced as an attempt to restore harmony and prosecute crimes committed between October 1<sup>st</sup> 1990 and December 1994. 70% of all convicted people belonged to category 3 crimes and 5% to category 1%. In 2012 Kagame judged the Gacaca courts to have been successful.

The strengths of the mechanism were the ability to try cases at greater speed than international courts; greater transparency promoting truth and dialogue; the reintegration of perpetrators into the society. The weaknesses were that the government controlled the files, the proceedings and directly influenced the judges; it was a one-sided form of justice and represented the victor's justice, because only genocide crimes, not the crimes of the invading army were addressed. The court system was also used as a tool to eliminate critics of the concept of the new Rwanda. In sum Dr Hankel argued that this mechanism gave Rwanda a form of truth commission without truth, for if those presumed guilty were willing to admit a series of crimes they could by their co-operation, receive a reduced sentence as a reward for complicity.

On balance the Gacaca court system was a dynamic illustration of grounded, bottom-up justice. However, such courts could not be referred to as a form of transitional justice, for refining trust remained an unachievable ideal, because the conflicting narratives are not compatible. The minority is protected by the state and the international community, while for the Hutu majority, there is little chance of restoring either their reputation or securing reconciliation as the experience of genocide was so horrendous. Of major concern was the manner in which two apparently similar atrocities had different outcomes for the perpetrators. In judicial terms the definition of an act as either a crime of genocide or a crime against humanity had real, deep seated implications, both positive and negative for the two types of perpetrators and their victims.

### **Respondent: Plenum**

One significant intervention was that the acknowledgement of their crimes by the perpetrators was an important part of the reconciliation process, for a degree of ambiguity was replaced by some degree of empirical certainty, a degree of closure for the families of the victims. This practice could perhaps be reproduced in other contexts, such as the Palestinian case.

Whilst acknowledging the primacy of bottom-up mobilisation, Dr Hankel introduced a possible solution by reference to an authoritarian top-down military solution aka Rwanda being adopted in Israel so as to bring some order to the situation. However, this was not his personal preference merely an observation drawn from the Rwandan episode. Other than that, it was observed that there would be little to be gleaned as lessons from Rwanda to the Israeli-Palestinian situation.

However, a lasting problem in Rwanda and Israel-Palestine is the question of victimhood which has yet to be fully addressed.

Grass root initiatives challenging the official record is a permanent reminder that to a limited extent people can still exercise some power and influence, despite all the difficulties and this is particularly the case for the role of women acting en mass as critics of regimes in such distinct contexts as Argentina, Northern Ireland and the RSA.

### **Final Remarks and Conclusion**

The Chair reminded the workshop that both the creation and successful implementation of strategies at all levels within the political hierarchy are largely determined by the answer to the question as to what counts as a lasting settlement?

In anticipating further discussion and co-operation in the future he suggested that it would be advisable to host a similar gathering where there would be a focus on Israel and on a variety of Jewish perspectives. It would also be beneficial to augment the current findings by conducting more intensive work on the following:

1. The role of territory, safe spaces, controlled access and boundary adjustments.
2. The continued fine line between violent and non-violent political activism as an instrument for political mobilisation.
3. An analysis and re-evaluation as to what partial solutions work, why, and for how long?



4. The manner in which successive generations repeat the behaviour of previous generations, even if the mobilising issues change over time?
5. Economic aspects of peace building and reconciliation.
6. Social programmes which derive from the recognition of the 'other' in terms of the language of statutory education and Higher Education; this involves teacher training, rewriting text books and resources for effective pedagogy; learning a previously discriminated language is not the same process as using that language in an optimum number of domains, especially true within local government, the health sector and social services. Thus, public services in a differentiated language (e.g. Irish) should best be seen not as a sop to the dissenting community, but as forming part of a public good agenda.

In thanking the participants and organisers Professor Williams concluded that the workshop had demonstrated that the struggle to promote reconciliation, let alone achieve equality of status, between contending parties is challenging, constant and unending. Further, political leadership is crucial at whatever level in the socio-political hierarchy - and even the most detailed and well-constructed programmes for peace-building can come unstuck if elements lack conviction or actors feel that they have been marginalised or structurally discriminated against by hegemonic partners to any agreement.

Third, for some, positive rhetoric, substantive discourse and symbols are inspiring and can overcome the inherently exasperating nature of international and domestic rules, regulations, requirements and obligations. However, permanent consensus at the local level

mediated by bottom-up mobilisation cannot sustain a people indefinitely without the top-down prospects of peace and reconstruction, but for far too many people caught up in conflict and post-conflict situations, this is what gives meaning to their daily life and must be the platform upon which a hope for better prospects is built.

Fourth, local administrative leadership is often just as important as political leadership, thus recalcitrant managers in fields such as education, health care, employment and housing provision, can slow down reform while purposive managers can implement recommendations with conviction resulting in a strategy, an action plan and demonstrable results.

Fifth, respect is the essential value for any organisation involved in post-conflict reconciliation: respect for citizens, for institutions, for public servants, and for politicians. Yet but ultimately respect is so often culture-bound that it is nigh on impossible to manufacture, so perhaps a more realistic virtue would be mutual accommodation as a more realisable goal in the first period of co-creative programmes for lasting peace.

Sixth, appropriate resource investment and infra-structural development are essential if there is to be a financial guarantee of the political, human right and policy agreements. Pronouncing co-equality of treatment without the capacity to deliver the attendant programmes is a sure-fire way of prolonging or reigniting grievance-based opposition.

Seventh, policy recommendations need to be framed in a way that bureaucrats can understand and implement them. Thus, following periods of relative peace and consensus building we need to be able to evaluate the real behavioural, political and socio-economic changes brought about by conflict-resolution measures, both to reassure interested parties and to contribute to best-practice principles.

Eighth, time is critical, over the medium and the long term, both to allow healing and reconstruction, but also because continued intransigence can reopen old wounds, redefine long-standing issues as current crucial priorities and allow for memories to be reactivated by pressing, instrumental factors.

A classic example of this is the Good Friday Agreement signed on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998, but only fully implemented in May 2007. For although it has brought peace and prosperity there are again current concerns expressed by many, and voiced by former Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern (1997-2008) on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018 during the Brian Lenihan memorial lecture at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, that a hard border between North and South following Brexit could precipitate a fresh eruption of violence by dissidents.

Ninth, the narratives reproduced by both official records and independent academic historians and other scholars, writing sometime after the real-world events, may seem at variance with the recollections, perceptions and memories of the participants involved. This is because there is a tendency to rationalise, to sanitise and to impose trajectories upon a context which may undervalue the emotional, conflictual and irrational bases for behaviour. It almost certainly underplays the impact which chance, serendipity and the

idiosyncratic nature of key actors has on the final outcomes and the search for lasting peace.

In concluding the VHI organisers thanked the participants for their valuable contributions and announced that it was proposed that a follow-up workshop would be convened in the Spring of 2019.